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ABSTRACT

Responding to research indicating that more concentrated efforts and innovative approaches are needed to change the negative teacher and student attitudes toward the disabled in mainstreamed classrooms, the pilot program described in this paper was designed to foster communication between the regular classroom teacher and the special education teacher by encouraging student teachers from special and general education classes to work together in program planning and implementation. The paper outlines the program and presents survey data about teacher attitudes and attitude change related to mainstreaming disabled students. The paper notes that the involvement of reading faculty along with special education faculty is a logical place to begin working on structuring intradepartmental courses that foster positive attitudes toward the disabled, because both departments normally have clinical components in their teacher education programs. General goals established for participants in the pilot program are listed, as are nine specific behavior objectives. Encouraging preliminary evaluations of the program are noted, and plans for further applications of the program in both preservice and inservice settings are discussed. (RL)

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MAINSTREAMING: THE NEED TO PREPARE THE NONDISABLED

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MAINSTREAMING: THE NEED TO PREPARE THE NONDISABLED

With the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, PL 42-142, now in force, one can read about the implementation of the law and how it will affect the education of the disabled child. What seems to be left unsaid is any statement directed toward the attitudes of the nondisabled. Are the nondisabled children and teachers ready to accept the disabled? Will the disabled move into classrooms where positive attitudes toward them will be evident?

We cannot just follow the guidelines of the law by mainstreaming the disabled without being concerned about how they will be received. Merely placing children who are different into a classroom will not guarantee acceptance. As an example, if we look back at the results of the Civil Rights Movement and forced busing, we find that integration alone did not change attitudes toward those children placed in new settings.

No matter whether the disability is a mental one, an emotional one, or a physical one, disabled people often express the idea that the negative attitudes of the nondisabled toward them is more a limiting factor than the actual disability itself. Itzhak Perlman, the professional violinist, was quoted as saying, "Steps are not the only barrier we face, the attitudes of other people are sometimes the toughest" ("People," 1981).

If disabled adults find it difficult to deal with the negative

attitudes which are directed toward them one would wonder how these same negative attitudes would affect school age children. It is highly probable that if disabled children are confronted by negative attitudes, then their chances of meeting academic success are lessened. Today with over 3 million special education students with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities enrolled in the school systems, it is increasingly more important that steps be taken to insure that positive environments are provided for them. And positive environments are not possible unless we can guarantee that these children will not be confronted with negative attitudes from their teachers or peers.

The fact that children as well as teachers have negative attitudes toward the disabled has been established in the literature. The studies done by Billings (1963) and Cohen (1977), as well as others, all give evidence of the negative attitudes of the nondisabled toward the disabled. For example, Billings examined the attitudes of 54 nondisabled students toward the disabled. The students were selected equally from three schools and from grades one, three, and six. She determined that all the students had unfavorable attitudes toward the disabled but the attitudes of the oldest students were the most negative. Since we know that these negative attitudes exist we need to be aware of what can be done to bring about changes.

Research has established that attitudes can be changed both negatively and positively. Using reading as a means of changing

attitudes had not been given much attention prior to the 1930's. One of the early reading people to address the issue of reading as a change agent was Rosenblatt (1938). She accredited many sources of a literary nature as an effective means in the education of young people. Her writing implied that through reading one could experience many occurances that were unattainable through actual contact. She saw books as a way in which the young person could vicariously learn of others. She wrote that society tended to develop individuals who were unaware of the needs of others; yet she also believed that the individual who involved himself in literature could become more adjusted to people who differed from the norm. Of the research studies using reading to change attitudes, the most noteworthy to date are those of Jackson (1944), Feltman (1954), Fisher (1968), and Tauran (1967). They all found that reading specific materials did bring about changes in attitudes. The attitudes being changed in those studies were directed toward Blacks, occupations, American Indians, and Eskimos respectively. In each of the studies the materials were presented in a lesson type format. In most cases a discussion of the reading materials took place after the reading was completed.

Studies which have specifically focused on changing the attitudes of the nondisabled toward the disabled have involved the use of reading materials, personal contact, integration, and video tapes. In one of those studies, done by Friedman (1975), it was suggested that integration alone would not guarantee a positive attitude change

and that it could indeed serve to increase a negative attitude. Friedman's example was that too often children with disabilities were excluded from regular classroom activities, such as recess, physical education, or field trips and this served to draw attention to their differences. Friedman went on to suggest that when activities were used which were positive in nature, and specifically planned, a positive shift could take place. A parallel can be seen between Friedman's example and the learning disabled child who is excluded from academic activities as well as academic success because of his inability to compete with the nondisabled child. This too, would draw attention to the differences between the learning disabled child and the nondisabled child. In Friedman's study, a class of nondisabled students participated in various types of activities with a group of disabled children. All activities were planned so that the differences between the two groups of children would not be emphasized. At the end of the study the nondisabled children had become more positive in their attitudes toward the disabled.

Specifically planned activities were also used in a study done by Lazar, Gensley and Orpet (1971). In this study eight year old students read about physically disabled, successful adults. After reading the stories the children were visited by disabled adults. At the end of the study there was a positive shift in the attitudes of the eight year olds toward the physically disabled.

In a study done by Bond (1979), four classes of eight graders were given five short stories to read. The stories were about physically disabled people who had become successful in adult life despite their disabilities. The purpose of Bond's study was to investigate the effects of reading on the attitudes of eighth grade students. Since Public Law 94-142 was just being implemented, Bond chose to investigate the attitudes of the nondisabled toward the disabled, specifically toward the physically disabled. The stories were assigned as outside reading and were not discussed in class. While Bond found that there was a positive shift in attitudes toward the disabled, the shift was not statistically significant.

If the negative attitudes of school age children toward the disabled are to be changed, a concentrated effort must be undertaken in the classroom. Unfortunately, using the school setting to promote a positive attitude change has not been reported that frequently in the literature and what has been reported has not been all that promising.

Integration, personal contact, or instructional materials alone do not seem to work. What needs to be implemented is a planned instructional approach where appropriate materials can be combined with the personal contact of disabled people. A materials list needs to be made available to teachers. Teachers also need to be made aware of all local services that could be used to provide information

as well as supply names of individuals who would be willing to visit in the classroom. All this, in addition to, planned curriculum guides designed to help the teacher implement programs that would help promote positive attitude changes toward the disabled.

Before we can expect students to be able to change their attitudes toward the disabled we have to be sure that their teachers, who are serving as models, also have positive attitudes.

Most of the research that has been done has focused on the attitudes toward the physically disabled. Recently there has been more attention given the attitudes of teachers toward the learning disabled and the learning disability resource program.

In a survey recently conducted by Bond and Dietrich (1982), it was found that classroom teachers who had negative attitudes toward the special education resource program also had negative attitudes toward the special education children who were mainstreamed into their classrooms. The survey was constructed and administered as the result of a pilot program for student teachers. The pilot program had been designed to foster communication between the regular classroom teacher and the special education resource teacher. The major goal of the program was to encourage student teachers, from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation, to work together in program planning and implementation for the benefit of the special education student. Bi-monthly meetings

were held with the two involved faculty members and the student teachers. The meetings were for the purpose of monitoring progress, the sharing of ideas, and the implementing of adaptations. General goals were established for all participants as well as the identification of nine specific behavioral objectives.were:

For the General Education Teacher:

--to report progress in class to resource teacher

--to identify areas of concern (academic and behavior) in a large group setting

--to provide classroom schedule to resource teacher regarding scheduling for resource

--to inform resource teacher when tests or new concepts will be presented so that pre-teaching may be initiated

Special Education Teacher (resource):

--to conference with general education teacher concerning IEP's

--to relate specific strengths and weaknesses of child to general education teacher; explain characteristics of particular handicapping conditions

--to give some estimate of performance expectancy in regular classroom when activities are being presented which are above child's ability level

--if a behavior modification program is being carried out in resource, suggestions for continuation in regular classroom may be provided when deemed appropriate.

At the end of the pilot program an evaluation was carried out.

The evaluation was based on the nine behavioral objectives using a question type format. Although eight of the nine objectives were met in terms of communication, this communication did not appear to facilitate change. The student teachers appeared to view those objectives as requirements set by the college staff rather than viable methods for helping the students. It was found, to a degree, that stereotypes had already been established. The regular classroom student teacher continued to attribute poor classroom performance to behavior and lack of motivation rather than deficits in skill areas. The special education student teacher tended to protect the students rather than attempt changes in curriculum to aid their regular classroom performance. Interaction during group conferences was often hindered because of these views.

While the regular classroom student teacher and the resource student teacher recognized the need for a mutual involvement that was directed toward benefiting the resource child, they both became involved in the role of two separate teaching responsibilities. The question then arose: "Were the student teachers modeling, what they perceived as appropriate behaviors being exhibited by their cooperating teachers?"

In order to try and answer this question, Bond and Dietrich designed a survey to assess teacher attitudes toward the special education resource program. As mentioned earlier, they found that there was a statistically significant correlation between the negative attitudes teachers had toward the resource students in special education and the special education resource program.

Bond and Dietrich believe that attempts to change teacher attitudes toward the disabled can be made both at the preservice as well as at the inservice levels. At the preservice level these attempts should be made prior to student teaching.

Dietrich and Bond have designed a program to be implemented in the Spring semester in which they will again work with students from the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. The students involved will be those enrolled in either a special education class or a reading methods class. Activities will include work in simulated M-teams, program planning for the special education child, oral and written procedures which will foster communication, and an understanding of the roles of each teacher involved with a special education student.

Specifically, preservice teachers in regular education classes need to be shown how to interpret the I.E.P.'s written by special education teachers, how to interpret test scores and the implications of those test scores for the success of the special education child in the regular program.

The involvement of reading faculty along with special education faculty is a logical place to begin working on structuring intra-departmental courses that foster positive attitudes of teachers toward the disabled. It is highly probable that faculty from both departments have had preparatory backgrounds that include a clinical component. They have worked with students of differing ability levels and should be aware of the needs of those individuals as well as the correlation between positive self-concepts and success in school. Many have extensive knowledge of test and measurement procedures as well as the experience for using test results to write diagnostic-prescriptive lessons.

Following the completion of the semester of combining the classes from the two departments the students will be monitored in their student teaching field experiences. Criteria still needs to be established so that an evaluation can be carried out at the end of the program. It is hoped that inservice sessions could be arranged for the cooperating teachers who have student teachers in their classrooms. The inservice sessions will focus on ways in which the special education teachers and the classroom teachers can work together for the benefit of the special education student. If positive results are derived from the pilot program than plans will be made to begin implementation on a larger scale.

There are many avenues to be explored in the area of attitudes toward the nondisabled. Besides providing appropriate materials for

the classroom as well as teaching guides for using the materials we also need to be concerned with changing teacher attitudes along with the attitudes of the students. Much remains to be done but it can be accomplished. Thus, there is hope that children who are mainstreamed, with any type of disability will find positive environments awaiting them.

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